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Sri Lanka: Government must investigate paramilitary group violations

An upsurge in arrests, "disappearances" and torture linked to paramilitary activity in the Vavuniya area must be urgently addressed by the Sri Lankan government, Amnesty International said today in a letter to President Kumaratunga.

"The People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE), paid and armed by the government, has been perpetuating a pattern of systematic abuses," the organization said.

Fifteen children who were allegedly being trained by PLOTE at the "Lucky House" camp have been transferred to an unknown PLOTE camp. Amnesty International is urging the government to locate the children and return them to their families.

Some prisoners who have been arrested by the army intelligence unit have been held at PLOTE camps and in at least one instance were visited by an army officer. Two people remain "disappeared" after they were last seen being questioned by members of PLOTE in early June.

"The continued high level of human rights violations in the Vavuniya District is bolstered by the practises that have developed between the Tamil armed groups, particularly PLOTE, and the armed forces. The armed forces can claim no improvement in the human rights situation until it can exercise control over paramilitary activity."

Amnesty International is calling on the President to intervene directly:

- to urgently bring all Tamil armed groups directly under proper command and control systems,
- to ensure that Tamil armed groups are not involved in the recruitment of child soldiers,
- to ensure that all places of detention are officially recognised and designated as such, and
- to conduct a speedy and impartial investigation into the use of unauthorised places of detention and the abuses which have taken place therein.

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